United Nations A/70/PV.118

General Assembly
Seventieth session

Official Records

118th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 13 September 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lykketoft ..... (Denmark)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Statement by the Secretary-General

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: Today we bring down the gavel on a productive session of the General Assembly. I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your skilled leadership. Had this session adopted only the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1), that would have been notable enough. But Member States achieved much more than that. Members reached an early agreement on the draft outcome (resolution 70/302, annex) of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants that will be held this coming Monday. This must now lead to greater compassion, solidarity and a global sharing of responsibility.

At a time of appalling attacks in so many places, members reviewed the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Assembly also held a much-needed special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem. That outcome document (resolution S-30/1) gives us a rights-based approach that stresses prevention, treatment, robust criminal justice and law-enforcement actions. And members held a series of very useful thematic debates on human rights, peace and security and the plight of children and youth affected by violent extremism.

The Assembly also took important steps to strengthen transparency in the work of the Office of the President of the General Assembly. That is in keeping with our wide-ranging efforts to make the Organization more accountable to the world's people. One of the most notable innovations of the seventieth session concerns my Office, that is, the choice of my successor. The Assembly has set in motion a process that is shining greater light onto what has been a largely opaque process. Informal dialogues with candidates have helped Member States get a good sense of their visions and views, and have enabled the world's people to feel more involved in the process — as they should be. Whatever happens in the weeks ahead, this newly opened process has set a new standard from which there should be no retreat.

Finally, Mr. President, on a more personal level, let me say that I have greatly appreciated working with you on so many challenges.

I congratulate all Member States and our many partners on a solid record of achievement. The seventy-first session will build on these gains as we continue striving to resolve conflict, protect human rights and advance prosperity for all on a healthy planet.

I thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership and I wish you continued success in the future.

Statement by the President

The President: A year ago in this Hall (see A/69/PV.1), I outlined how I hoped we could galvanize a new commitment to action and instal a spirit of transparency and openness in our work. I believe that

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we have made considerable progress, and yet so much more needs to be done.

We kicked off the largest summit in United Nations history by adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1). In a world of poverty, climate change, conflict and forced displacement, with impunity for rights violations and huge gender and social inequality, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), together with the historic Paris climate agreement, has outlined the routes for the evolutionary tranformation of our whole pattern of production and consumption. This is not only possible, but we also really have no choice in the matter. If we are to avoid future division and destruction — a crisis on a scale far greater than any known to humankind today — then the relentless and integrated implementation of the SDGs and climate action is an absolute necessity.

My first high-level thematic debate focused precisely on the plans, actions, finance, technology and partnerships needed for this. We managed, after much discussion, to place the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review framework on a more solid footing. Members are now in a good position to consider how best to align the Agenda for the General Assembly in light of the SDGs.

The Assembly also dealt with a list of important issues in relation to the SDGs. The 10-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society showed how explosive technological development presents both incredible opportunities and incredible challenges. The special session on the world drug problem saw strong support for a response rooted in human rights and in the advancement of public health. The meeting on the global battle against HIV/AIDS recommitted us to ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. We also saw a recommitment to the implementation of support for the least-developed countries at the midterm review of the Istanbul Programme of Action in Antalya. Preparations got well under way for next years conference on how better to protect our oceans and marine biodiversity.

In just over a week's time, world leaders will address the most recent movements of refugees and migrants, in order to recommit to their international obligations and build on the achievements of the Secretary-General's World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. However, it is obvious that achieving the 2030 Agenda will also demand a reverse of trends in maintaining peace and security and respect for human rights.

The deterioration in protecting human rights is observed in many countries as we mark the tenth anniversary of the Human Rights Council. In my high-level thematic debate in July, we focused on how that deterioration affects issues of non-discrimination, the rule of law and civil society space.

The General Assembly has also held meetings on the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. We discussed the Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative and the responsibility to protect. All the while, dangerous conflicts are ongoing and expanding in size and number, causing enormous humanitarian catastrophes. Disarmament negotiations have only disclosed long-standing divides and both military budgets and tensions among major countries have unfortunately increased. The General Assembly discussed the three major United Nations values on peacebuilding and peace operations and on women and peace and security, as well as the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, and we undertook a 10-year review on United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The overarching focus of discussions in the high-level thematic debate I organized in May and in the debate following the briefing by the Secretary-General was on the urgent need for real change both in Member States' approaches and in the number of troops available to the United Nations. Peacekeeping must be evaluated and there must naturally be zero-tolerence for any sexual exploitation or abuse by United Nations peacekeepers. Moreover, in the Fifth Committee, agreement is needed to provide better funding for mediation, prevention and peacebuilding, in order to reduce the number of conflicts and costly peacekeeping operations in the future.

According to the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council is supposed to be the guardian of global peace and security, but in too many serious conflicts there has been no consensus and no action. We need major and minor Powers to recreate what led us to the SDGs, the climate agreement and the negotiated outcome on the Iranian nuclear programme, instead of new war or proliferation. We need to understand that by implementing the Security Council's road map for peace in Syria and the ceasefire agreed over the weekend, in the global fight against terrorism, and in the need to stop arms and reinvigorate disarmament negotiations, we have existential common interests that are much more important than our conflicts of interest.

We need Security Council reform that can contribute to this common understanding. Discussion about this reform has been ongoing for over two decades, with only minimal progress made. The work this year, facilitated by Ambassador Lucas of Luxembourg and building on last year's text and annex, points to the common understanding that we need at least an enlarged Security Council that better reflects the geopolitical realities of the twentieth century. But if the General Assembly is serious about reform, all key players, including the five permanent members of the Security Council, have to change the script and be willing to compromise.

Reforms are important, but within a few weeks there will also be the extremely important selection of the new Secretary-General. I am very proud that we broke new ground with unique transparency in the selection process. The two-hour presentation of each of the candidates in the General Assembly dialogues and their collective global town hall in this Hall were important highlights and helped to include the global public in the debate about the future of the United Nations. I hope that transparency proves instrumental in identifying the best possible new Secretary-General over the coming months. I also appeal to the Security Council to make the remaining process open and engaging to preserve the legitimacy of its recommendation as it feeds into the Assembly's final decision.

This morning, I sent a letter to the Council summarizing the process to date and setting out some of the lessons we have learned so far. That letter also addresses the call of a large number of members for the appointment of co-facilitators to prepare an appointment draft resolution during the next session. In my view, such a call is consistent with the spirit of transparency and inclusivity with which the process has been imbued to date. At the same time, as we move towards the final decision, we must focus on forging consensus and ensuring that the next Secretary-General will receive both the full support of the membership and adequate preparation time before taking office.

Transparency and openness, however, must go far beyond the Secretary-General selection process. Throughout this session, I have sought to instil greater transparency in everything we do, and I am delighted to see that many of the steps I have advanced relating to the integrity, transparency and accountability of my own Office have now been codified in resolution 70/305, on the revitalization of the General Assembly, adopted earlier this morning, and I look forward to witnessing the first-ever taking of an oath of office by the incoming President in just a few moments.

But we also face deadlocks on the issue of civil society participation in United Nations meetings. The HIV/AIDS meeting from 8 to 10 June was particularly overshadowed by objections to the participation of non-governmental organizations that focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. It is time to find sustainable and reasonable solutions. More broadly, we must also work to consistently improve the effectiveness of the General Assembly. There are, for example, outstanding challenges in the Fifth Committee. While we managed to reach agreement on the budget in time, far too much rigidity remains in the Organization and budgeting, and in Member States' positions. Similarly, on a number of occasions, agreement in negotiations was held up by one or two delegations alone, which in itself undermines the collective power of the Assembly. In addition, it is clear that the workload on delegations, on the Office of the President of the General Assembly and on relevant parts of the Secretariat is growing year on year, and it is critical that we focus our efforts on those areas where we can add the most value.

Before concluding, allow me to extend my gratitude to all who contributed to the results of this session. First of all, it has been an honour and a pleasure to work closely and amicably with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his team. We must all especially congratulate him on the successful outcome of his years of hard and tireless work for climate action. I wish him the very best for both the remainder of his term and for his future endeavours.

I wish to thank the membership for its commitment, cooperation and friendship during this session. In particular, I wish to thank each of the Permanent Representatives who played a prominent role in bringing various processes forward; the Vice-Presidents and the various facilitators and chairs of the regional groups; as well as the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Presidents of the Security Council, with whom I have enjoyed close collaboration.

I also wish to thank colleagues across the Secretariat, especially Ms. Catherine Pollard and her team in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, who have been of immense assistance to me and my Office. Similarly, I wish to

thank all those who contributed to my Office either through financial support or secondments, or both.

Not least, I wish to thank each and every one of my own team who have been so professional, enthusiastic and innovative throughout the year. Special thanks also go to the officials in the Foreign Ministry, including the Permanent Representative of Denmark, and to the Government that asked me to come forward as candidate. I hope I have brought good Danish values and attitudes — directness included — to this year's presidency.

It has been a great honour to be President of the General Assembly. I encourage members to continue to make this organ more relevant, more outward-looking, more transparent and, of course, more effective. In His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, the Assembly will have an excellent President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session who is committed to doing just that, and to giving a universal push to the Sustainable Development Goals. I thank everyone for their attention and cooperation.

We are now coming to the end of the seventieth session of the General Assembly. I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, President-elect of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session, to make a statement and, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/305, of 13 September 2016, to take an oath of office.

The President-elect: Prior to assuming the high office of the presidency and taking the solemn oath of office, I have a few remarks to make before parting with my status as President-elect.

First, on behalf of all who are gathered here today, it is my duty and privilege this afternoon to thank the President of the General Assembly at its seventieth session for his selfless service to the United Nations throughout the past year. President Lykketoft brought new levels of transparency and openness to the United Nations, and there are few who do not see the many benefits derived. In that regard, one need think only of his clear, firm leadership of the General Assembly's comprehensive interaction with the candidates aspiring to the fill the post of the next Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Transparency calls for the exercise of our most worthy qualities of honesty, equity and ethical behaviour. Under its wide purview, we are required to hold ourselves to accountable to the highest standards expected of us as the selected representatives of humankind congregated here at the United Nations. The Lykketoft legacy is therefore a demanding one, but I am confident it will be an enduring one, and I for one will commit to building it over the coming session.

On behalf of my colleagues here present, I say to President Lykketoft that his was a job well done. His was a mantle well worn, and he should leave the Hall today in the full knowledge of our appreciation. I ask my colleagues to stand with me and express that thanks by acclamation.

The members of the General Assembly expressed their thanks to President Lykketoft by acclamation.

The President-elect: Next, I wish to express thanks to the Secretary-General for the continuation of his great service to the world. In the seventieth session, the Secretary-General's commitment to the creation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1) achieved glorious fruition. His relentless pursuit of a breakthrough on climate change was rewarded in Paris. We are blessed with another four months of his leadership, so today is not the time for valedictory praise, but it is a reminder that we must seize the months ahead to garner from him all the broad wisdom and venerable experience he can pass on to us this year. I very much look forward to working closely with the Secretary-General and his team between now and the year's end.

The seventy-first session will be a special year for us all, not least because we will have the experience of working with two Secretaries-General. The search for the best possible candidate to fill the post is approaching its final stages. Once the selection process is complete, it will be important that we undertake an orderly appointment and a smooth transition to demonstrate the strength of our institutional stability. As the President of the General Assembly, I will dedicate myself to facilitating the transition process. I will be available at all times to assist the incoming Secretary-General settle into her or his responsibilities of office.

Throughout the seventy-first session, I will work to strengthen relations among the United Nations organs, continuing the practice of holding regular meetings with the Secretary-General, the Presidents of the Security Council and the President of the Economic and Social Council. I will inform the membership as to the scope of those meetings. In addition to upholding the principles of transparency and inclusiveness during the seventy-first session, I will seek to give greater prominence to ethics in the work of the United Nations.

As far as the Office of the President of the General Assembly is concerned, financial transparency will be maintained by ensuring that all contributions to the running of the Office are entered into the United Nations Trust Fund, where donors and expenditures will be public knowledge. In that regard, I thank the Governments that have contributed to date for their generosity and support for the work of the Office of the President in the seventy-first session.

I also thank the Governments and agencies that have seconded staff to the Office of the President for the seventy-first session. We have a large staff this year because of the appointment of a team specifically dedicated to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. That team has been put in place to fulfil the commitment I have made to achieving meaningful progress in all 17 Goals during the seventy-first session.

However, that commitment will not be delivered by the General Assembly alone, and in that regard I will work to strengthen the engagement of civil society and other actors in our overall work. I have heard and will respect the membership's desire for a calendar less crowded with high-level meetings and events. I am undertaking to look at creative ways for us to address the many pressing issues before us without crowding that calendar. We will strive to find new methods to sustain peace, to resolve entrenched conflicts, diminish the atrocities of global terrorism, better manage migrant and refugee flows and resolve the many humanitarian crises that remind us that millions of people in our world are still denied even the most basic conditions for a secure life.

I welcome the cessation of hostilities that has come into effect in Syria and call on all parties to honour the terms of the agreement. I sincerely hope that this understanding may ease the humanitarian suffering and lead to a lasting peace for the Syrian people.

The link between sustainable development, peace and security and human rights has never been more explicit. I will therefore encourage a heightening of human rights work of the General Assembly throughout the seventy-first session. Next week, for example, the world's leaders will come together for the high-level meeting on large movements of refugees and migrants. I regret the evidence of widespread lack of empathy for people on the move, many of whom are fleeing conflict, persecution or climate change. I congratulate those who are not shirking their responsibilities for decency. It is time to turn down the rhetoric of intolerance and ratchet up a collective response based on our common humanity.

There is much the seventy-first session must undertake in the area of peace and security. Building on the review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, including the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, we will act on improving the United Nations architecture to face those threats. In these troubled times, no community is immune to violent extremism and terrorism. We face this scourge together, and we must find the solutions together.

As the representative of a proud troop-contributing country these past four decades, I am fully aware that we must be diligent in coherently implementing the outcomes from last year's United Nations reviews on peacekeeping, peacebuilding and on women and peace and security, including through action in the Fifth Committee relating to the special political missions.

We must also look to take forward the implementation of the ambitious "sustaining peace" agenda agreed by the General Assembly and the Security Council earlier this year. Through the concept of sustaining peace, we have the opportunity to bring new coherence and coordination to our work across peace and security, development and human rights — our shared goal and responsibility for sustaining peace across the globe.

Reform of the Security Council is also a work at hand for the seventy-first session. The membership is unanimous in agreeing that reform is necessary to align the Council with the realities of the twenty-first century, not least of which will be the security consequences of climate change. The question is not whether reform is necessary, but how and in what form it will be achieved. And since reform is required in the best interests of the community of nations as a whole, it is therefore logical that the community as a whole

must move forward together in resolving reform. I am committed to facilitating that movement in the seventy-first session.

This time last year, we were gearing up for the Summit to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Like a lighthouse in a world dogged by despair and division, the 2030 Agenda came into existence, and we had a bright new beacon to light us out of the poverty and unsustainable practices that bedevil our planet. The 2030 Agenda has since had its foundations strengthened by the historic promise of the Paris Agreement on climate change. It has been heartening to observe the sincerity with which Governments and national planning agencies around the world have begun integrating the Agenda into national processes.

But make no mistake, the great majority of humankind has yet to learn of the Agenda. It has yet to embrace the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which, if successfully implemented, will bring an end to poverty and secure a sustainable place for humankind on our planet. It is for that reason that the theme of the seventy-first session is "The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world". The seventieth session launched the SDGs, and for integrity's sake the seventy-first must be the one in which we witness the wheels turning on the implementation of all 17 Goals. I am committed to taking those Goals to the people, so that they can understand them as rights and responsibilities, as humankind's recipe for a sustainable world for them and their children. I wish to see us provide clear guidance through this year's quadrennial comprehensive policy review process in support of an efficient and integrated response through the United Nations system, so that we are confident that the system is up to the massive task of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

I will look to advance action to revitalize the agenda of the General Assembly and align it with that of the 2030 Agenda, and I will work closely with the President of the Economic and Social Council to ensure that the work of both organs is mutually reinforcing. I will also support a successful Habitat III conference in Quito in October, and I will work to deliver a truly game-changing outcome for the health of our oceans through the conference on Goal 14 to be held here at the United Nations in early June 2017.

As promised, I have formed an SDG implementation team within the Office of the President. I will work to advance a range of initiatives and events in collaboration with the membership of the Organization, the United Nations system, civil society, the private sector and others, aimed at getting the wheels of implementation turning. We must look at finance, education, outreach, partnership and resourcing. Throughout the seventy-first session, we will hold ourselves accountable for achieving that meaningful progress on each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to invite my two granddaughters, Grace and Mirabelle, to join me on the rostrum. They have flown all the way from the South Pacific to be with me on this day, and there is a reason I would like them to be with me while I say what I have to say to the Assembly. Grace is 7 years old and Mirabelle is 5. That means that when the remaining 14 years of the Sustainable Development Agenda have expired and the year 2030 is upon us, they will be young adults, ready to fulfil the potential of their lives. What kind of world will we have bequeathed them and all their brothers and sisters around the world, our own grandchildren and children, born and yet to be born?

Will it be a world where the projected loss of biodiversity on land and sea severely limits the possibilities of life, where atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide have gone well beyond the threshold of between 1.5° and 2° Celsius, thereby imperilling humankind's place on this planet? Will it be a world in which today's unsustainable patterns of consumption and production have spiralled out of control, where poverty, inequality and wretched governance have driven people to desperate acts of violence, migration and human degradation? Or will it be the world we envisage in the 2030 Agenda — a world of planetary prosperity, in which the scourge of extreme poverty has been eradicated; where food security and healthy lives are enabled and water and sanitation provided to all; where inequalities have been reduced in peaceful, inclusive, just, well-governed societies; and where women and girls are empowered, cities and settlements are safe and resilient and quality education is equitable and inclusive?

If humankind's will-power is strong enough, by 2030 this will be a world in which energy is sustainable and affordable for all, and where men and women will have decent work within resilient infrastructure,

sustainable industries and the limitless possibilities of innovation. People will live on a planet where we have taken the necessary action to combat climate change and restore terrestrial ecosystems, and where the cycle of decline in which the oceans are currently trapped has reverted to a maritime world free of pollution and the deleterious effects of acidification, once more enjoying healthy fish stocks and coastal ecosystems.

It goes without saying that it is towards such a better world that we must make our course, and I swear, on my love for my grandchildren, that I will do everything in my power as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session to keep the goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda on course and to ensure that the promised shores of a sustainable way of life on our planet will be achieved when the year 2030 comes around. The communal conscience of our generation will not rest easy until it is clear that we are going to achieve the SDGs. And the seventy-first session will fulfil its aims only if at its end we can be assured that real progress is under way on each of the Goals, that our faith and hope in progress are not misplaced and that a better world will be at hand by the year 2030. And I thank Grace and Mirabelle.

In its wisdom and dedication to the highest standards of governance, in fealty to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the membership of the United Nations has this year created a code of ethics for the presidency of the General Assembly. I applaud the results of those efforts, and I embrace the spirit and word of the code. In addition, members have decided that, for the first time in the history of the United Nations, and for all sessions henceforth, at the time of transition from one session of the General Assembly to the next, the incoming President shall take an oath of office. It is now my high honour to take that oath, within this historic fulcrum of the community of nations, witnessed by the appointed representatives of the nations and by the broad citizenry of humankind observing our proceedings today.

I now raise in my right hand the Charter of the United Nations and hereby affirm the prescribed presidential oath of office.

> "I solemnly declare that I shall truthfully perform my duties and exercise the functions entrusted to me as President of the General Assembly of the United Nations in all loyalty, discretion and conscience, and that I shall discharge these functions and regulate my conduct with the interest of the United Nations only in view and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the code of ethics for the President of the General Assembly, without seeking or accepting any instruction in regard to the performance of my duties from any Government or other source external to the Organization."

Closure of the seventieth session

The President: Before proceeding further, I would like to invite to the rostrum the President-elect of the Assembly at its seventy-first session, His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, to hand over the gavel to him.

I declare closed the seventieth session of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.